

## A GROWING EPIDEMIC

Prescription painkiller misuse is a growing epidemic affecting workers from all industries and all types of jobs.

As workplaces all over the country see an increase in employees impacted by misuse of prescription opioids, employers and human resources professionals continue to look for the best way to fight this epidemic. It's difficult for employers to navigate, since most employees using prescription painkillers have obtained them lawfully with a valid prescription. However, it is important for employers to understand the negative impacts of the issue, and what they can do about it.

**\$78.5 billion/year:** The amount the economy loses from the consequences of prescription pain medication misuse, including healthcare, treatment for substance use disorders, and reduced workforce productivity.

**\$450.90:** The cost per user per year - opioids continue to be the costliest class of medications for occupational injuries.

**70%:** The number of employers who have experienced employee opioid prescriptions misused and opioid use disorder in the workplace.

**81%** The percentage of employers who lack a comprehensive drug-free workplace policy.



**DOSE OF REALITY**  
PREVENT PRESCRIPTION PAINKILLER MISUSE IN TEXAS.

**Learn more at: [DoseOfReality.Texas.gov](http://DoseOfReality.Texas.gov)**

A message from the Office of the Attorney General of Texas, Texas Health and Human Services, and the Texas Department of State Health Services.



**TEXAS**  
Health and Human  
Services

Texas Department of State  
Health Services



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**PRESCRIPTION PAINKILLER**

**MISUSE**

**A DOSE  
OF REALITY  
FOR EMPLOYERS**





## WHAT YOU CAN DO

First, consult your human resources professional and/or legal counsel before you do anything. This is where civil rights, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA), the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), and many state protections come into play. Although federal and state laws limit your options in addressing prescription drug use in the workplace, that doesn't mean you can afford to do nothing.



### Here are some steps for employers to take:

#### **Evaluate or re-evaluate your company's drug policy.**

Your company has the right to provide a drug-free workplace. However, your drug-free workplace policy might only currently address illegal drugs. With the increased use of opioid (or narcotic) prescription painkillers, you should revisit these policies and update them in tandem with human resources and legal counsel. Consider revising your policy with treatment in mind, even employee-sponsored treatment.

**Consider including prescription medications in your company's drug testing program.** Drug tests can be perceived as being highly intrusive, but they can be invaluable tools for preventing drug-related incidents and reducing risk, according to the National Safety Council. In several safety-sensitive industries, in addition to the industry-standard Department of Transportation panel, employers are also testing for prescription medications such as barbiturates (pentobarbital, butabarbital), benzodiazepines (alprazolam, diazepam), synthetic opiates (hydrocodone, hydromorphone, and oxycodone), propoxyphene (although this drug is no longer manufactured), and methadone.

#### **Educate employees about the dangers of prescription painkiller use and misuse.**

According to the National Safety Council, employees should know:

- To discuss concerns about taking prescription narcotic and opioid painkillers with their prescribing medical professional and ask for a non-narcotic alternative.
- What state law says about driving while using prescription drugs. In Texas, drunk driving and drugged driving are both viewed equally under the law, even if you are under the influence of a legitimately prescribed medication.
- The risks of taking painkillers while performing safety-sensitive tasks.
- How to safely store and dispose of prescription painkillers.
- Never to take someone else's prescribed painkillers

or share any drugs with anyone.

- In 2015, adults between the ages of 25-54 accounted for 65% of opioid-related poisoning deaths in Texas.
- **Train supervisors and managers.** Make sure they know the company's current drug-free workplace and drug-testing policies and any updates as they're made. Train them to recognize the potential signs of drug impairment and the proper steps to take if they suspect an employee is impaired. This includes keeping naloxone on-site and training employees to use it if someone is experiencing an overdose.
- **Look into use of an Employee Assistance Program (EAP).**

As an employer, you have committed resources into finding, hiring and training the best people you can. Protect your business by helping educate employees on the risks of prescription painkillers, and provide help for those who may be suffering from misuse. By becoming familiar with the signs of misuse, proactively testing or clarifying company policies around prescription drug use in the office,

